SYNOPSIS

In the modern age, that unchartered terrain is cultural, and those hybrids now appear not at the edges of the map, but at its very centre: the city.

- Roy, 1997, p. 84

Introduction

In this thesis, I am trying to look at dancers, practices of dance pedagogy, and performances in the city of Kolkata since 1990 economic reforms. I aim to do this by perceiving dance as a synecdoche of the city. Studying through the prism of dance practices gives one a way of understanding the transformations in urban culture three decades after globalisation. This leads to constructing a triad relationship between the city, dance and identity which can be used to map a shift in the culture of the city of Kolkata by understanding the changes in dance pedagogy and performances since new economic reforms. Most of my dancer respondents are contributing towards deconstructing and reconstructing the culture of the city by 'dancing a difference.' They are co-constructing the changing culture of the city, which is closely linked to economic opportunities and, in turn are also constructing their own identities through their dance practices and performances. Such practices and performances represent the interaction of myriad dance forms, styles and pedagogies. This is seen in various other cultural dimensions of urban life, such as culinary cultures offering different cuisines in restaurants across the city and practices of music and theatre, where urban cultures, economies and identities conjoin to transform cultural landscapes of the city.

While discussing dance practices in the city of Kolkata since liberalization of the economy, I ponder upon the relationship that gets established between people who are dwelling in the city and the city that they are constructing and re-constructing through their experience of it as a lived place and space. I conceive of practices of dance as constantly mediating between lived experiences in the city, urban spaces and associated cultural memories and meanings, and urban cultures. I follow Appadurai's (1996) notion of the 'scape' by which he meant a space which is fluid, representing disjunctive and hybrid nature of culture, economy and media in a global modern world which is always under construction. I conceptualize a dancescape to understand

the triad relationship of dance, city and identity and how there is a continuum of space-place and culture.

This work is based on dance practices in Kolkata. Much like many other cities in the country, there are various dance forms practiced in the city, classical and contemporary. The unique feature of Kolkata is that it is not been a site of emergence of any particular dance form, but dance has been a prominent feature in the cultural landscape of the city. However, Kolkata has been the home of Uday Shankar, pioneer of modern dance in India, and Rabindranath Tagore, whose influence is evident in music, dance and theatre practices in the city. Calcutta was also home to cabaret dancers during and post colonial rule. These women were the refugees of the partition of 1971 who chose non-indigenous dance as their means of livelihood and performed in spaces like hotels of the Dalhousie and Chandni Chowk perceived as morally decadent for the 'respectable' Bengali middle class of the then Kolkata. Children from a very young age are taught dance, music, theatre, painting as these are considered to be markers of 'culture' in the city. In fact, the cultural history of the city is fraught with the kobi-walas (the kobi gaan singers), the jatra (street pantomime) performers, the courtesans (patronized dancers in royal families) and so on. Such cultural practices of the city in various manifestations are embodied by the people living in the city today. Moreover, the city's everyday life also reflects dance practices in the form of festival rituals like *dhunuchi naach*[1] and *bhashan* naach[2]. Dance is a part of everyday life in the city evident in family rituals like wedding or engagement or birthday and marriage anniversary parties.

In the past three decades there has been a shift in practices of dance in the city indicated by the proliferation of dance schools which teach forms like Jamaican street dances of dancehall, Dominion Republic's national dance form like Merengue, Western contemporary, break dance in the styles of hip hop, popping and locking, whacking and so on. What intrigued me in this work initially was how to explain this shift in practices of dance and what does that say about the city? How is it that Jamaican street dances are being taught and learnt and performed, besides already existing classical dances, Rabindra Nritya and other creative forms? Thus, this work is focused on understanding the practice of these new forms being

[1] A dance performed by men and women in Durga Puja, one of the biggest festivals celebrated in the city of Kolkata

[2] Dance performed by any and every people of the city during the time of immersion of the idol of Durga towards the end of five days of worshipping it.

taught in the city. As one cannot demarcate clear distinctions with other forms and styles of dance, I also discuss the practice of other established non-classical dance forms.

Research Questions

While attending a number of dance classes in and around the city, I was drawn to the fact that these emerging dances and dancers are continuously pushing the boundaries of dance practice(s) through their choreographies, pedagogies and performances that have remained largely unexplored in literature and thus need scholarly attention. Additionally, the city itself has been engaging in several dance festivals and dance exchange programs being organized by some of the leading dance companies or institutes of the city like Sapphire Dance Academy, Udayan, Pickle Factory Dance Factory and so on. Such a picture of the city and its people's engagement with dance made me want to understand: How does the dancer with his or her own identity mediate between dance practices and the city? Pursuing this question, I attempt to look at: Firstly, how dance is being taken up as professional identity becoming a route of social mobility and specifically how gender and class identities define the trajectories of the dancers in their profession. Secondly, what pedagogies are being adopted and by what forms of dances and how are dance forms and pedagogies creating a market in the city space? Is there a relationship between dance forms, pedagogies and processes of identity building? Thirdly, what are the themes of dance performances taking place in the city and how are they reproducing and constructing the dancers' identity and the cultural ethos of the city?

Theoretical Insights

I draw from fields of urban studies and dance studies attempting to establish a dialogue between them. I also draw from cultural geography and postmodern approaches in urban studies literature. Besides, I navigate through the various dances being practiced in Kolkata to tap the shift, if at all, in choices of both career and dance forms made by the dance aspirants in the city. To accomplish this, I draw on Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualization of taste as a cultural capital acquired by the middle class. I use his concepts of cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital to make sense of fluidity in identity and class position. Following fluidity in social class and identity, I locate hybridity in dance practices and identity. I also draw from theories of globalization of Appadurai (1996) and Pieterse (1994) focusing on hybridity and Bauman's (2000) understanding of liquid modernity.

Research Design

After some preliminary fieldwork I selected dance schools in Kolkata as the primary site of this research that teach several dance forms promoting them as lucrative career. These are Kohinoor Dance Academy-Barat Colony, Dumdum teaching Creative, Bharatnatyam and martial art, Ritushree Dance Institute-Burabuzzar teaching Bollywood with contemporary, Ikonic Fitness and Dance Studio-Hazra Road teaching merengue, Zumba and contemporary, Black Eyes Dance Institute-Prince Anwar Shah Road teaching contemporary and Bollywood and kathak, Sapphire Creations Dance Academy-Salt Lake teaching contemporary.

I gathered voices from seventy two respondents by adopting a mixed-method approach that comprises: (1) reading and analysing dances; (2) fieldwork by conducting interviews with the dance practitioners and performers in the city as well as attending performances and post-performance discussions; (3) recording performances, collecting photos and videos, and documenting performances in my field notes. Names of all respondents have been changed. Some of the interviews were in Bengali, and the excerpts presented here are translated to English.

Dancers and their Identities: Class, Gender and Mobility

I demonstrate how the middle class of the city are developing a taste for not only classical and folk dances but they are also learning and cultivating exotic dance forms which significantly reflect a freedom of choice in acquiring cultural capital and an economically independent life style based on dance, something that was not available to their earlier generation counterparts.

To account for a holistic understanding of the city and its cultural dynamics, I interrogate how the dancers of the city, with their socially lived identity markers of class and gender, negotiate with various dance forms that they are learning, teaching and performing. I also demonstrate how different forms of dances are being taken up as a professional identity becoming a route of social mobility. I quote (translated from Bengali) the words of a parent of a student in a south Kolkata dance school:

> *I learnt kathak because of interest. Qualified my B.A too. But I liked dancing very much. Then there were not so many dance schools and not much of cultivation of it. After marriage when I got a daughter, saw her dancing quite spontaneously well. At the age of three and a half put her to school A s h o k Hall wherein the first program she was given to dance at the center stage and was appreciated. Her father and I*

searched for a dance school and got her admitted here. She is nine years now learning dance for four years. She takes much interest in dancing. If she wants to pursue it we do not have a problem. Something that I was deprived off, she should not be...she is learning western because she is interested in it and may be because, now it is more popular. I bring her twice a week for the classes.

The above excerpt interestingly accounts for two generations of dance learners, the mother and the daughter, and their exposure to dance in different temporal contexts in Kolkata. They come from a middle class family residing in Salimpur, in south Kolkata. What is evident from the above narrative is that there has been a change in the perception of dance in the city, particularly among the middle class.

Dance is now being adopted seriously as a profession by many who are learning and practicing it. In fact, not only are they confining themselves to one form of dance, they are learning a couple of forms and styles of dance to enhance their professional avenues in dance and quite a few are also taking up dance as a vocational training in their higher studies from universities abroad. Two of my respondents from well reputed schools of Kolkata were already placed in leading universities in the US where they were taking courses in Contemporary dance studies. Taking in-depth interviews online, I gathered information regarding their aspiration to come back to Kolkata post their course to open a dance school and teach these new forms of dancing, "a new thing that would start in Kolkata," quoting one of my respondents, Trisha. This, I argue, is a glimpse of this "new thing" that is evolving through dance and dance practices in Kolkata.

Many of my respondents have chosen to build up their identity as a dance performer or trainer after having an identity as a professional in some other field of education or engineering. Ms Shonali, before becoming a dance teacher of Sushila Birla High School and running a private dance academy now had been a chemical engineer earning a good package then. However, she chose to take up dancing as her profession. Mr. Raj, from being a B.SC student of Chemistry to a background dancer in Bombay film industry, is now a dance teacher and owner of Shuffle Street Dance Academy, in Sector III area of Salt Lake. I argue that this shift reflects a fluidity in choosing professional identity which is becoming very common exemplifying liquid modernity (Bauman, 2004). Interestingly, a young dance aspirant at the Barat colony dance class, says, "My father is a civil servant and whenever there is a family get together, people ask me what I am doing. To this I proudly state that I dance. They ask, what else do you do beyond dancing, to which I answer, I dance *only* with passion and perfection, *nothing*

*else beyond that"***.** Dance among the middle class youth as a career, I argue, generates a dance consciousness to embody it not only as a culture but as an economic independence and means of livelihood. In fact, the middle class of the city today is rethinking about their values and professional choices.

The mapping of this shift in building professional identity accounts for an understanding of the dynamism of the culture of the middle class in contemporary Kolkata. Several middle class youth, are building up professional identity on dance, theatre, music, sports, modelling and the like. It is not simply a transition from white collar jobs to pursuing one's passion by taking a chance. It is much more of a planned investment and engagement with one's passion. I contend that such people are constructing the new middle class in the era of globalisation post new economic reforms of 1990 following Fernandes (2006) who identified a change in the structure and nature of the middle class in India due to the market driven economy. This gave rise to a 'new middle class' who constituted 'the chief beneficiary of the global economy as well as a main support for greater global integration' (Fernandes, 2006 quoted in Krishna and Bajpai, (2015) p. 69).

Many of my respondents are males who have taken up dance as a profession. Males taking up dance as a profession or changing their profession from engineering to be self employed by opening dance schools teaching various forms of dance also represents a shift in the relationship between gender and choice of career.

To infer, Bengali men choosing dance as a profession,both classical and non classical, in Kolkata now are challenging hegemonic discourses on masculinity. This could be because of the popularity of the reality shows as a couple of my Bengali upper caste middle class male respondents stated. They are running dance schools in many parts of the city by attracting the dance aspirants to learn from them as they have been "technically trained along with grooming." Moreover, practicing several dance forms, exotic, folk, classical, western and Bollywood, these men are pushing boundaries in the cultural perception of the male dancing body facilitated by the television screens and reality shows telecasting male dancers and winning trophies. They are bringing in a change in the 'field' and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1994) of their middle class culture through dance.

Dance as a profession and the choice of dance form narrates a different story in post liberalization Kolkata for women too. One of my respondents, is a middle class educated woman teaching merengue, the national dance of the Dominion Republic and the other a

Brahmin middle class political science honours graduate woman teaching dancehall, an exotic dance form, a street dance of Black working women of Jamaica. The middle class upper caste woman of Kolkata who had been a bhadramahila (gentle woman) being educated within the domestic domain during the early twentieth century (Chatterjee, 1989) had become the Bharatmata (mother goddess of the nation) during late colonialism (Oberoi, 1992). In post independent India, she was the bearer of middle class cultural capital. In Kolkata, the bhadramahila learnt Rabindra sangeet and received English education from convent schools that would give her better marriage prospect. While this continues, there is also a shift that has taken place because learning dance was relatively uncommon as compared to music during post independent Kolkata (Sen, 2014) but it is being taken up as a professional identity post new economic reform. This shift in professional career for upper caste middle class educated women of Kolkata indicate a change in the gendered understanding of dance and performance among the new middle class in Kolkata.

This historiography helps to infer that several non classical dance forms being chosen as both performance and practice by the upper caste middle class men and women of Kolkata undergo a process of de-contextualization as they are being performed in another space and another time by dance aspirants of Kolkata as noted by Urmimala Sarkar Munsi (2010). Drawing from the field, thus, it becomes inevitable to argue in favour of a shift that has taken place not only in the social category of the middle class and its culture but also in the perception of dance as a profession for both genders. This is also because dance as a profession and identity is also a route for social mobility and economic independence.

Teaching and Learning Dance: Market of Dance Schools in Kolkata

Studying various dance schools in the city helps to interrogate the relationship between various dance forms and their pedagogies and how the dancers are navigating across them to build up their professional identity as dancers and personal identity through forming a creative self. The world of dance pedagogy entails guru shishya parampara, digital learning, kinaesthetic and somatic approach of explaining dance movements, and capsule learning in workshops. Different pedagogies are associated with particular dance forms. For example, classical dance forms following the guru shishya parampara, as Ananya Chatterjea (1996) and other dance scholars have accounted for, are adopting few changes because of the style of the forms of classical dances. However, non classical, exotic dances and Bollywood, contemporary creative dance forms have adopted different pedagogies.

I attended a workshop conducted by Preeti Vasudevan, an American based Indian dancer, in

Padatik Little Theatre where the participants, including me, had to remember any childhood feeling or incident and express through the body movement individually. Through this exercise our memories were recuperated to recollect an experience of the past that was spoken out through our bodies in movements. Such was the essence of time, space, and body in dance. The excerpt above denotes how movement and space are being reimagined in dance techniques. I argue such imaginations give rise to the creative self of the dancer, giving space for self expression which is more prominent in the practice of non classical dance forms. The new generation dance aspirants are learning several dance forms which help them to embody pedagogies that they can experiment with, which become tools of their self expression. They identify themselves as a dancer when they can express themselves using various languages of dance forms. Construction of self identity here is not only professional but also entails a creative 'self' that gets articulation socially and culturally through their performance and experimented pedagogy. This construction of self identity is based on a market for dance schools.

The market of dance education and entertainment in Kolkata reflects the fact that urbanism and urbanity of the city is being co constructed with and through dance pedagogy and performance. This is because it is tapping on the creative output of the people of the city who wish to earn their means of livelihood by building up on their creative self. This accounts for an understanding of the dance market of supply and demand in three dimensions and they are dance form or category, dance pedagogy and a creative 'self' that the dancers reckon with.

For the dancers, learning exotic dance forms means that there is an interaction of these 'forms' with the specificity of Kolkata's cultural memories and dance histories. Also, it contributes towards the cosmopolitan culture making of the city. Simultaneously, the dancers are building their identities by capitalizing on a skill that are helping them narrate their stories both lived and imagined. One can infer that the urban culture of the city of Kolkata is revolving around the axes of the body, dance forms, and a culture industry along with dance practices and pedagogical techniques. This new city scape, following Appadurai (1996), is configured as the 'dance-scape.' The 'dance-scape' exemplifies a transformation in the cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 2004) of the middle class of the city. An excerpt from the field will establish this: "Though my mother is trained in Bharatnatyam I learned both Bharatnatyam and western because both my mother and I dreamt of opening a dance school which we did in 2009. Running three schools one in Beadon Street, Jorabagan and Burrabazar where we teach Bharatnatyam, Western and Bollywood I have recently joined (2022) Techno

India as an Assistant Professor of law. So, in the weekdays my mother teaches and in the weekend I teach." Here, my respondent is co constructing cultural and economic capital at two levels; firstly, by maintaining dance along with academics, she is adding on to her cultural and economic capital and secondly by learning additional forms of dance she has enhanced her cultural capital to earn more economic capital.

To conclude thus, this chapter demonstrates how dancers are building their identities, not only as performers, but also as teachers experimenting with their 'own' styles of self expression and techniques of pedagogy. This is how they are becoming agents of change by reforming or adding to the city and its people's economic and cultural capital.

Re-making City, Re-visiting Identity through Dance Performances in Kolkata

The city reverberates with various dance performances in various places like in dance school annual functions, festivals, concerts organized by dance companies and schools and in the fests of educational institutions. Attending an annual concert of Sushila Birla Girl's School at Vidya Mandir titled *Mahabharata: An Adaptation*, I witnessed the Mahabharata being performed through contemporary dance with live aerial stunts. Such a representation is reminiscent of the concept of 'heterotopia' advocated by Michel Foucault (1986) which are conflicting spaces producing incompatible juxtapositions. I use this to explain how the dance performance of Mahabharata turns a performing space in the city into a heterotopia of conflicting imaginations and disjuncture between time and space. The theme of the show, an old epic, being danced by the young children of the contemporary city represents a disjuncture between time and performing bodies which is mediated by contemporary dance. The epic characters performing aerial stunts and aerial dances reflect a shift in the popular imagery and historical narrative. Disjuncture, as deciphered in the theme and space of performance, shows an incompatible juxtaposition of the global contemporary dance movements, with the iconic imagination of local historiography. Thus, following Foucault (1967), one can understand how dance performance in the city today changes the city's geographical and cultural spaces into a heterotopia creating an illusory sense of a city place, a space reinforcing Raban's (1972) notion of 'soft' cities', which refers to the imagined side of the city that allows a certain indeterminacy, fluidity and subjectivity of city dwellers.

Another performance that one of my respondents recalled to have performed entails an understanding of emplacement through dance and cultural specificity of the lived city. "*In Suta Nuti Parishad performance I presented a dance performance on the three hundred years of Kolkata's babu bibi-ana those times and contemporary times. How we traversed from those*

times to contemporary times-a three hundred years history of Kolkata" says Ms Sarita, who is the founder of Ramyani Institute of Performing Arts, in College Street. This performance that she described represents the spatial history of a city through relationships between the subjects of the city. The dance performance quoted by my respondent can be examined in terms of portraying a changing relationship of conjugality from colonial times to the contemporary times circumscribing to the lived history of the city's culture, economy and spatial dynamics. The dimension of spatial dynamism can be understood and analyzed in my dancer respondent's choice of proscenium to have presented such a theme in Sutanati Parishad in 2017. Sutanati in north Kolkata has a history of British merchant residency during colonial times. This spatial history of the place has informed my respondent to conceptualize and choreograph such a dance performance. Interestingly, my respondent is also an English post graduate from Bethune College and academically informed well about the cultural history of Kolkata. This indicates how themes of dance performances and social identities of the dancers interact with the urban spaces and their specific histories representing a cultural ethos of the city.

Further weaving together concepts of heterotopia and 'soft city' of Foucault and Raban respectively, I illustrate a dance performance in 2022, Arjunpur, in north Kolkata. The puja had pulled visitors to an alley in Baguiati to witness the daily ballad of the workers' life, performed live in a cyclical act. The pandal had an unconventional idol wearing a *gamcha* (closest translation in English could be towel-a cloth used to wipe the body after a bath) cloth saree. Visitors saw how the space of the city was being utilized by the performers around the idol to perform, through dance, labour like typewriting, running errands, drying clothes and welcoming the sun. Such a spectacular performance of labour within the festive infrastructure of the pandal represents a re imagination of the grand festival of the city in terms of its changing meaning making processes. This resonates with Guha-Thakurata's (2022) work on *The Durga Pujas of Contemporary Kolkata.* Thakurata observes that the Durga pujas of Kolkata have acquired a distinct status because of its cosmopolitanism and inclusive nature. There are similar performances in different pandals in the city, which take up themes of folk dances, Tagore dance dramas and creative fusion and environmental degradation. During my field work I gathered that Sapphire Creations Dance Company has started an official You tube channel named TV Sapphire where its past and present performances were uploaded. One of its past performances, I saw constituted an enriching source to understand identity issues through their dance performances. Alien Flowers, a dance performance of the Sapphire was the first dance performance addressing the life journey of a gay man. It was

Asia's first performance on the LGBTQIA+ community staged in Kolkata, 1996. According to its director and my respondent, Sudarshan Chakraborty, it is one of the prized dance productions "tracing the journey of a gay man from birth to youth to death transcending the fight and acceptance of both the form and content of sexuality and contemporary dance over the years.," Sudarshan stated.

This informs my understanding of how dance in the city of Kolkata today entails the "problem of identity." Moreover, the dance performers are portraying various characters and negotiating their lived self with a plurality of their performing selves which co exist within them while dancing. This negotiation, I argue, place them in the Third space of in betweenness, reminiscing cultural theorist Homi Bhabha, engendering a hybridity in identity Thus, in this chapter, I show how the various performance themes and imaginations of dancers grapple with issues of identity, spatial historicity and cultural geography to construct a 'soft' city.

Conclusion

To conclude, dance performances and pedagogies represent the city and identity as much as it constitutes it. They are also being influenced by urban spaces as much as they are impacting them. Besides, place, space and culture get entangled within these representations and constitutions. The inference drawn from the performances and pedagogies is that the culture scape within the city which had historical and cultural memories of education, white collar job defining a person's middle class and gendered identity is no longer the only constituent element of the lived city. Cultural exchanges and practices through dance exhibits that the urban residents are remaking the lived city and reconstructing their identities by importing dance practices through media, travel and education and changing them into commodities. This explains the shift from the cultural moorings of the city pre new economic reforms to three decades post new economic reforms of 1991.

The dancers are negotiating their lived culture of the city with the imported culture reforming and befitting them to the local cultural realm whereby neither the imported nor the local remains the same. This 'cut and mix' process at play in the dance market is qualifying dance as a commodity for dance consumers. I contend that the dancers are becoming cosmopolitan consumers of dance to write many dance forms on their body which is giving them a hybrid identity by making them dis-embedded from the specific culture of the place or city they are inhabiting. They are living the city as a dancer which is accounting for their placeness but they are embodying dance of various forms and crossing cultural boundaries and national borders through exchange programs in dance which explains their place lessness. I contend,

the dancers' identities are baffling within the buffer zone between placeness and placelessness by living hybrid identities.

In fact, through 'cut and mix' practices in all cultural practices of Kolkata like dance performances and pedagogies, culinary art, music, drama and language the city and its people seem to unfurl hybridity whereby the specifics of site, locality, history and territory are subsumed within the dominant and the popular forms. But that does not mean that 'places' do not have any significance in this process. From the dialogue between the embodiment of socio-cultural dimensions of urban life and the different dance forms, there emerges not only new languages of the city from the attempts of self-expression of the dancers, but also, dance forms get continuously transformed.

However, it seems appropriate to conclude this work with a quote by Robert Stake (2005), 'Many researchers would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing and anyone's telling' (p. 456). Every researcher knows the truth of this statement and needs to make decisions about which parts of the collected data to use for presentation in the thesis and how to weave the chosen data together in a meaningful way. My intention was to create a picture, a 'mosaic,' of the chosen dance practices and pedagogies and performances in Kolkata, an approach that Norman Denzin (2005) and Levi Strauss (1996) calls "making 'bricolage' (quilt making)" (p. 4). In other words, my work is limited to the few chosen dance performances and pedagogies through which few dancers could narrate their engagement with the culture of the city as well as other cities and nations through dance. Another significant element of any art form is the readers and audience of it besides the performer and creators. My work has not pondered upon the responses of the audience of dance performances though it acknowledges that the audience do constitute a significant demographic element of the city who can also contribute towards city making. This did not figure in my work but it claims to broaden this scope for further research. In fact, dance practices and pedagogies that I discuss in this work may unfold enquiries into dancers' and their audiences' transnational and global webs of dance connections with diaspora that facilitates their sense of placelessness yet placeness when they feel culturally affiliated to them through dance. Such cultural connectedness may grapple with concepts of global citizenship blurring cultural boundaries and political and geographical borders.